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THE PREACHER AND HIS PROVINCE.

BY HIS EMINENCE, CARDINAL GIBBONS.

AFTER the Bible, the study of mankind is the most important and the most instructive pursuit for the ambassador of Christ. The aim of his ministry is to enlighten and convince, to persuade and convert his fellow being, to elevate him to a higher plane of moral rectitude.

The first step toward the accomplishment of this noble aim is to obtain a thorough knowledge of man, his springs of action, his yearnings and desires, his passions and emotions, his vices and temptations, as also the arguments, the motives, and the means best calculated to promote his spiritual progress.

Now, the knowledge of the mysterious kingdom of the heart is more accurately acquired by studying the original than by seeing it described in a book. An artist makes a better portrait from a living subject than from his photograph. We view objects in the abstract in books, but in the concrete in living men.

Books describe human beings as existing in times and countries, or under circumstances different from our own. But in studying the race that surrounds us, we contemplate man just as he is to-day.

We see him not as reflected through the mind of another, but as viewed by ourselves. Human nature, it is true, is everywhere

radically the same, but it receives a coloring and an impression from its environments. Man is influenced and modified in temperament and habits of thought by his social and domestic surroundings, and by the political institutions under which he lives.

By a knowledge of his own times and people, the speaker can accommodate his remarks to the special needs of his hearers.

An exhortation that would be admirably suited to a French or a Spanish congregation, might not be adapted to an American audience. A discourse against the evils of divorce, which is so vital a subject with us, would scarcely find any application in Ireland, or the Tyrol, where divorces are almost unknown. A sermon that would be most appropriate to a fourth or fifth century congregation, might be out of place in our time and country, as the prevailing errors and vices of those times are not the predominant errors and vices of to-day. St. John Chrysostom's arraignment of the voluptuous Court of Constantinople in the beginning of the fifth century would be a libel if applied to-day to the White House at Washington. His denunciations of the theatre in that city could not be justly repeated from an American pulpit without some important reservations.

They who have long experience in the ministry, cannot fail to observe the faults into which young clergymen, whose knowledge is chiefly confined to books, and who have had, as yet, little opportunity to commune with their fellow-men, are sometimes liable to fall. They are apt to attach undue weight to matters of minor importance, and to treat lightly subjects of grave moment; they may be strained, fanciful, and unreal, and talk over the heads of the people; or they may denounce in unmeasured, exaggerated terms, a social plague scarcely known by the congregation.

I once listened to a clergyman condemning in vehement language, low-necked dresses where their use was utterly unknown, and where the censure had as little application as it would have had among the inhabitants of the arctic regions. I heard of a young minister of the Gospel who delivered a homily on the ravages of intemperance before an audience composed exclusively of pious, unmarried ladies, who hardly knew the taste of wine.

Some of our separated clerical brethren are not unfrequently betrayed into similar errors by ascribing to their Catholic fellow-citizens religious doctrines and practices which the latter repudiate. A caricature, instead of a true picture, is held up to the

public gaze, because the information is drawn from books, hearsay, or tradition, and not from contact with living men.

Another advantage which we derive from a discreet study of men, is the habit of moderation in our judgment of them. We will find that few men are altogether perfect, and few also totally depraved. Blemishes will be discovered in the most exemplary character, and traits of genuine goodness in the most abandoned and perverse. This two-fold experience will teach us to use sobriety of speech in praising virtuous men and women, including even canonized saints, and to avoid excessive harshness in reproving sinners. For if we paint righteous men without a single fault, we tempt the objects of our eulogy to vanity, and we discourage those that are earnestly aspiring to virtue; but if we paint the vicious as absolutely bad, we drive them to despair.

This subject is forcibly illustrated by the different methods pursued in writing the lives of men conspicuous for Christian or civic virtues. Some authors portrayed the saint, leaving out the man. They gave us the light without the shadow. There was no background to their picture. They exhibited an ideal character entirely free from human foibles. Many readers regard these biographies as one-sided and unreal, and take no pleasure in studying them. Others, accepting them as true, derive little consolation or encouragement from their perusal, since the model is beyond their reach.

Of late years, I am happy to say, we are treated to memoirs that aim at being true to life, that represent to us men of flesh and blood as well as of spirit,—men of strong faith, virility of soul, genuine charity, magnanimity of character, and self-denial, but not exempt from some of the imperfections incident to humanity. The merit of these biographies is that the author has either studied his subjects from life, or he represents them to us in their true light, as portrayed in their own actions and writings. The public man, whether churchman or layman, who never committed an error of judgment, or who was never betrayed into any moral delinquency, will hardly ever be credited with any great words or with deeds worthy of being transmitted to posterity.

The best models of biography are the inspired Penmen. They give us a faithful and accurate portrait of their most sacred subjects without any effort to hide their moral deformities or defects. David's sin, Peter's denial, Paul's persecution of the early

Church, the worldly ambition of the sons of Zebedee, the incredulity of Thomas, are fearlessly recorded without any attempt at extenuation or palliation. The transgressions of these men arouse our compassion without diminishing our reverence for them, and serve by contrast to lend additional lustre to the halo of their subsequent lives.

Who thinks less of Augustin and Jerome, because he sees them engaged in earnest theological controversy which almost snapped asunder the bonds of charity? Who finds his veneration and love for Basil and Gregory cooled, because of the melancholy estrangement that followed a long and tender friendship? Whoever would omit these episodes on the plea of edification, would mutilate these glorious lives? "Hath God any need of your lie," says the Prophet, "that you should speak deceitfully for Him?"*

Neither have God's saints any need of having their faults suppressed. They are not whited sepulchres, and they fear not the light.

The alienation between Burke and Fox at the close of their career, though much to be deplored, does not diminish our admiration for those two statesmen. It brings out in stronger relief, the inflexible character of Burke, who sacrificed friendship on the altar of truth. It shows us that upright men may sometimes differ in conclusions without violating conscience, or incurring the unfavorable judgment of posterity.

Modern biographers, while dwelling with pride on the civic and military virtues of Washington, avoid the language of hyperbole in which some of his contemporary eulogists indulged toward the Father of His Country. They seemed to be so dazzled by the lustre of that great luminary before he descended below the horizon, that they could detect no shadow in the object of their adulation.

Webster, too, shortly after his death, was lauded with extravagant encomiums as a man above reproach. The dispassionate testimony of Mr. Bryce,† who says that his splendid intellect was mated to a character open to censure, will be acquiesced in by the judgment of impartial readers. Yet, the American people admire and cherish, none the less, these two illustrious per-

* Job XIII. 7.

† "The American Commonwealth," Vol. II.

sonages, notwithstanding the more discriminating verdict and less fulsome praise of modern critics. The spots discovered in these effulgent suns, serve only to disclose in bolder light the splendor of their achievements. "Paint me as I am, warts and all," said Cromwell to Cooper, the artist.

The first living book that a student should read is his own heart, which is a little world in itself, a miniature of the great heart of humanity. "Know thyself," is a primary maxim of Christian, as well as of pagan, philosophy. Massillon was once asked how he could delineate so faithfully the emotions and rebellions of the human heart, and especially the intrigues, the ambition and jealousies of the Court, which he so rarely frequented. He replied that he drew his knowledge from the study of his own heart.

He will also find an open and instructive book full of object lessons in the mass of human beings that he may encounter in the daily walks of life. He can pick up useful bits of information from his companions during his college course, and afterward from the persons he may meet on the street, on the farm, in the workshop, in the counting-room, in the social circle, on the steamboat and on the railway.

Sir Walter Scott says that a man of active mind cannot talk to the boy who holds his horse without obtaining some new thought.

But it is especially while making his daily rounds through the parish that the clergyman acquires profitable instruction and subject matter for his sermons. He is made acquainted with their virtues and vices, and with the sources of their temptations. He observes their patience and fortitude in poverty and sickness, and their Christian resignation in the presence of death. He will often contemplate, in the cottages of the lowly, domestic peace and content which compensate them for their temporal privations. I have found evidences of genuine piety and gratitude even among the inmates of our penitentiary.

All this personal experience will enable the minister of God to speak in a manner intelligible and attractive to his audience, and to embellish his discourse by allusions to the incidents of daily life, like our Lord, who habitually instructed in parables, and who drew his illustrations from the surrounding landscape, and from the habits and occupations of the people.

This intercourse with living men not only enlightens the mind,

but it also quickens the sympathies, and fires the heart of the speaker in the pulpit far more powerfully than abstract learning; for what is seen affects us more sensibly than what is read, and the earnestness of our words is proportioned to the strength of our impressions.

The more the man of God studies the inner life of the people, their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, the more persuasive and moving will be his exhortations. He will come down to the level of his flock, he will be in touch with them, and they will recognize that his heart is in his work. He will retain his hold on the masses without neglecting the classes.

But, if the preacher has not the sympathy that is born of a knowledge of the people; if he cannot say with his Master, "I know mine, and mine know Me," he may enlighten without warming them. His words may be like oil poured on water; they will not mingle with their hearts' blood.

These remarks apply to statesmen and lawyers, as well as to ministers of the Gospel. O'Connell's influence over the people of Ireland was such as no other man in his generation ever exerted on any nation. He could sway the multitude, move them to tears or laughter, playing on every chord of their heart. The secret of his empire over his countrymen was that he had sprung from the peasantry, and had lived among them. He knew their grievances and aspirations, and sympathized with them in their wrongs and sufferings.

Gladstone would never have attained his acknowledged eminence as a public speaker without his vast experience in the House of Commons. It was in that great university of politics that he learned the art of a consummate debater.

Daniel Webster was not more indebted to his book-learning for his success at the bar, than to his keen discernment of human character, and to his power to conciliate and control it. The following anecdote of him was related in my presence.

He and Rufus Choate were once pitted against each other as opposing counsel in a lawsuit concerning an alleged infringement of a patent right on locomotive wheels. The wheels were before the jury. Rufus Choate, as counsel for the defendant, expended his legal acumen in a learned and labored mathematical essay, going to prove that there was an essential difference between the wheels in evidence, and, therefore, no infringement on the patent

right. Then Webster spoke for the plaintiff: "Gentlemen of the jury," said he, "you have heard an elaborate scientific disquisition upon those wheels. I have nothing of the kind to give you. There are the wheels. Look at them." The jury looked at them, and gave him the verdict. A judge, who attended the dinner, confirmed the truth of the anecdote, remarking that he happened to be engaged in that suit as junior counsel.

The difference between these two great lawyers was, that Choate bewildered the jury by the intricacies of a vocabulary above their comprehension, while Webster gained his case by appealing to their common sense.

Napoleon, though a poor shot, was the greatest general of his age. He said with truth of himself: "I know man." He owed his success to his insight into human character, which enabled him to make a judicious selection of his military officers and State officials.

I have heard of distinguished lawyers, when they have had an important case in hand, studying the habits, dispositions, and mental calibre of every member of the jury, and addressing to each in succession a few pertinent remarks calculated to convince his judgment, conciliate his good will, and gain his confidence.

Clergymen at the time of their ordination are, I think, as a rule, more thoroughly grounded in sacred science than graduating lawyers are in the abstract knowledge of their profession, because the curriculum of the former covers a longer period of time than that of the latter. But what the jurist may lack in book-lore, is compensated by his greater readiness of speech and felicity of expression. His faculties are sharpened by the contact of mind with mind in the courts, and by his habitual intercourse with the members of the bar, the jury and spectators. The earnest pleadings of his distinguished and experienced seniors are the strongest incentives to his intellectual activity and honorable emulation.

The soldier of Christ, on the other hand, on emerging from the seminary, is sometimes unwieldy, and is oppressed by the weight of his theological armor till he has acquired practice in the arena of Christian warfare.

This disadvantage on the part of clerical students would be overcome, at least partially, by the more general establishment and cultivation of debating societies for the senior classes

in our colleges and seminaries. In them they would learn to acquire ease and fluency of expression, and to wield with dexterity the sword of the word of God.

They should, besides, profit by every opportunity to hear and observe practised speakers ; for, as a person may read the most elaborate manual on politeness and etiquette, and yet be awkward and embarrassed in company, if he does not occasionally appear in refined society ; so the student may peruse the most approved treatises on elocution without much profit, unless he is brought face to face with recognized orators, and feels the magnetic and inspiring influence of the living voice.

The learned men of ancient Greece and Rome did not consider their education complete till they had travelled abroad, and acquainted themselves with the habits and manners of other people and climes ; and I am informed that, in our own day, a few of the leading universities of England and America have already a limited number of travelling scholarships.

Herodotus, the Father of History, derived most of the information embodied in his work from travel and converse with men.

Plato, after being eight years a disciple of Socrates, spent twelve years in the pursuit of knowledge in foreign parts before he returned to his native Athens.

Edmund Burke says of Homer and Shakspeare : “ Their practical superiority over all other men, arose from their practical knowledge of other men ”—a knowledge which Homer acquired by frequent journeys abroad ; and Shakspeare, by studying mankind at home.

Cicero improved his sojourn in Greece and Asia by studying oratory under the best masters in those countries.

St. Jerome, the most eminent Hebrew scholar of his age, visited various cities of Gaul and Greece, Antioch and other places in Asia-Minor, Palestine, Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria and other centres of learning in Egypt, where he consulted the men most conspicuous in those times for erudition and piety. When his own fame for learning was spread abroad, scholars from all parts of the civilized world flocked to him as to an oracle.

Sir Walter Scott’s charming novels are remarkable for their accuracy in the portraiture of Scotch character, and the scenes he describes. He obtained his information by traversing Scotland, living and conversing with the people, treasuring up their

bits of local traditions, and afterward interweaving them with his historic romances. "I have read books enough," he says, "and conversed with splendidly educated men in my time; but, I assure you, I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor, uneducated men and women, than I have ever met with out of the pages of the Bible."

It is well known that, while Milton is read by the few, Dickens is read by the million. He made personal visits to the prisons, insane asylums, reformatories, and boarding schools of England. He frequented the haunts of poverty, suffering, and wretchedness in London. His sense of indignation is aroused against official insolence, cruelty, and injustice; and his warmest sympathy is quickened in behalf of the victims of legalized oppression and tyranny. He draws his scenes from actual life; he deals with the men and women of his own time, and he gains the popular heart.

I was never more impressed with the impulse given to knowledge by contact with learned men, than during the Vatican Council, when Prelates of world-wide experience and close observation were assembled in Rome. Each bishop brought with him an intimate acquaintance with the history of his country, and with the religious, social, and political condition of the people among whom he lived. One could learn more from a few hours' interview with those living encyclopædias than from a week's study of books. An earnest conversation with those keen-sighted churchmen on the social and moral progress of their respective countries, yielded as much more instruction and delight, as compared with a printed account, as a personal inspection of an international exposition would, in comparison with a description of it in the pages of an illustrated periodical. The living words left an indelible impress on the heart and memory.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the student who aspires to improve his knowledge by travel, should already possess maturity of years and judgment, and should have laid the foundation of the science which he desires to cultivate and develop. Above all, he must be a man who has acquired the habit of close observation. You will find two companions returning from a journey made together; the mind of the one is stored with useful facts gleaned on the way, while the other has scarcely a single practical incident to relate.

It may be objected to literary tourists, that the knowledge they gather is sometimes purchased at the expense of piety; for Kempis says: "They who travel much abroad, are rarely sanctified." This axiom is true, indeed, of those that make excursions solely for pleasure's sake, but not of the diligent pilgrim who starts on his journey, bent on plucking fruits of wisdom by the road-side. David gave proofs of self-denial during his warlike expeditions;* but he sinned in his own home. Jerome's pilgrimages were blessed with an increase of sanctity and knowledge.

As the minister of Christ is pre-eminently the friend and father of the people, he cannot be indifferent to any of the social, political and economic questions affecting the interests and happiness of the nation. The relations of Church and State, the duties and prerogatives of the citizen, the evils of political corruption and usurpation, the purification of the ballot-box, the relative privileges and obligations of labor and capital, the ethics of trade and commerce, the public desecration of the Lord's day, popular amusements, temperance, the problem of the colored and Indian races, female suffrage, divorce, socialism, and anarchy—such are vital, and often burning, questions, on which hinge the peace and security of the Commonwealth.

Politics has a moral as well as a civil aspect. The clergyman is a social as well as a religious reformer, a patriot as well as a preacher, and he knows that the permanence of our civic institutions rests on the intelligence and the virtue of the people. He has at heart the temporal as well as the spiritual prosperity of those committed to his care. They naturally look up to him as to a guide and teacher. His education, experience, and sacred character give weight to his words and example.

There is scarcely a social or economic movement of reform on foot, no matter how extravagant or Utopian, that has not some element of justice to recommend it to popular favor. If the scheme is abandoned to the control of fanatics, demagogues, or extremists, it will deceive the masses and involve them in greater misery. Such living topics need discriminating judges to separate the wheat from the chaff.

And who is more fitted to handle these questions than God's ambassador, whose conservative spirit frowns upon all intem-

* II. Kings, or I. Samuel XXIII.

perate innovations, and whose Christian sympathies prompt him to advocate for his suffering brethren every just measure for the redress of grievances and the mitigation of needless misery?

The timely interposition of the minister of peace might have helped to check many a disastrous popular inundation by watching its course, and diverting it into a safe channel before it overspread the country.

Nor can it be affirmed that the temperate and seasonable discussion of these problems, or at least of those phases of them that present a moral or religious aspect, involves any departure from evangelical and apostolic precedent. There is hardly a subject of public interest that has not been alluded to, if not discussed, by Christ or his Apostles. I may cite a few examples.

Our Saviour speaks of the relations of Church and State in His memorable declaration: "Render, therefore, to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and to God the things that are God's."*

When the ancients asked our Lord to confer a favor on the centurion, they appealed to His patriotism, as well as to his zeal for religion. The centurion, they said, merits Thy bounty, "for he loveth our nation: and he hath built us a synagogue."†

John the Baptist gave this excellent advice to certain officers of the law who had consulted him: "Do violence to no man: neither calumniate any man: and be content with your pay"‡—a counsel that all public officials would do well to take to heart.

St. Paul eloquently treats of the duties and privileges of citizens: "Let every soul," he says, "be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God. . . . Render therefore to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor."§

When the commander ordered him to be scourged, Paul protested against the outrage, and asserted his dignity as a Roman citizen, saying: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?"|| The same Apostle treats with admirable tact and apostolic charity the delicate race question, both from a religious and social standpoint.¶

St. James devotes a portion of his Epistle to Labor and Capital. He denounces the injustice and oppression of the employer

* Matthew XXII., 21. † Luke VII., 5. ‡ Ibid. III., 14. § Rom. XIII., 17. || Acts XXII., 25. ¶ Gal. III.; Philemon.

in language which, if uttered in our time from a Christian pulpit, might be censured as a direct assault on the rich and an incentive to sedition.*

The reigning Pontiff, Leo XIII., in a series of Encyclicals, has enlarged, in his usual masterly manner and luminous style, on the great social and economic questions of the day.

In his Encyclical of January, 1895, addressed to the Hierarchy of the United States, his Holiness says : " As regards civil affairs, experience has shown how important it is that the citizens should be upright and virtuous. In a free State, unless Justice be generally cultivated, unless the people be repeatedly and diligently urged to observe the precepts and laws of the Gospel, liberty itself may be pernicious. Let those of the clergy, therefore, who are occupied with the instruction of the people, treat plainly this topic of the duties of citizens, so that all may understand and feel the necessity in political life, of conscientiousness, self-restraint and integrity ; for ' that cannot be lawful in public, which is unlawful in private affairs.' "†

Of course, the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls, form the habitual theme of the minister of religion, and the burden of his life-long solicitude. The subjects to which I have referred are, in the nature of things, exceptional and incidental. They should be handled, moreover, with great prudence and discretion, with a mind free from prejudice and partisan spirit, and in the sole interests of Christian charity, social order, and public tranquillity.

Words, inspired by motives so elevated, will strengthen the hands of the civil authorities. They will be " like apples of gold on beds of silver."‡ They will be the oil of religion poured on the troubled waters of popular commotion ; and the apostle of Christ, raising his voice in season, will merit the benediction of Heaven and the approval of all good men. " In the time of wrath," he will be a minister of peace and " reconciliation."§

J. CARD. GIBBONS.

* James V. † *Longinqua Oceani Spatia*. ‡ Prov. XXV., 11. § Ecclus. XLIV.